

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Personal Effectiveness in Project Management***: tools, tips and strategies to improve your decision-making, influence, motivation, confidence, risk-taking, achievement and self-sustainability
Author: **Zachary Wong, Ph.D.**
Publisher: **Project Management Institute, Inc.**
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Publication Date: 2013 ISBN: 9781628250299
Reviewer: **Ralph J. Mauelshagen, PMP, CCP**
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Introduction to the Book

Personal Effectiveness is something that is valued and coveted by anyone in any group of people, especially leaders. For leaders in a project manager role, however, the health of their projects, and even their projects' ultimate success or failure is determined by how well they manage "the human behaviors behind the tasks and activities."

To frame this book for the reader, Dr. Wong invokes the entire Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) as a foundation, noting its importance in prescribing a "well-organized, well-structured, disciplined approach." He then quickly opens the side door, into the realm of human behaviors, an area where he has previously demonstrated expertise (*cf.* Human Factors in Project Management, Zachary Wong, 2007).

Overview of Book's Structure

Dr. Wong helps the reader by laying out a simple visual structure, a map through which he will take the reader in the chapters to come. In this, his "Personal Effectiveness Cycle," he sets out four functions, each "powered by" two human factors:

- Decision-Making: Diversity & Values
- Motivation: Space & Set Point
- Achievement: Fear & Inclusion
- Sustainability: Passion & Goals

In the author's words, "Just as project life cycles provide a basic framework for managing the 'hard' skills in project management, this book provides a basic framework for managing the 'soft' skills..." He accomplishes this well, with a logical, memorable framework and tutelage.

Highlights: What's New in this Book

This book is more than just a rehash of Wong's 2007 book with a new title. In "Personal Effectiveness," he carries forward his "three-space" model (organizational space, team space and personal space), but it now fits within the "Motivation" function instead using it to set the structure of the book. Although several of the 2007 topics are realigned and reused within this book's framework (e.g., negative lower-level behaviors and positive upper-level behaviors), most of the material is indeed new.

Wong takes care to define terms, because the inattentive reader might misunderstand important concepts relative to "Diversity," "Space," or "Set Point." He also uses careful repetition (although not excessive), and understandable diagrams to familiarize the reader with these terms, their meanings, and their interdependencies.

Highlights: What I liked!

The most valuable components of the book are the charts and worksheets. With those, Dr. Wong personalizes the book and its recommendations to maximize the impact to each individual reader. These worksheets are mentally challenging, yet simple; detailed and complete, yet concise. Furthermore, he gives many classic helps (flip a coin... and assess whether you're pleased or displeased with the result), and less commonly known helps (which of course depend on which ones the reader has encountered in the past).

Carefully selected stories are used to illustrate new concepts, or concepts that could be easily misunderstood or misapplied. The author balanced the use of these well, not overusing nor underusing them. They are well-chosen, down-to-earth, and not obtuse.

The book does not suggest it, but it would be a valuable exercise to repeat the worksheet exercises after a year or two, to measure progress or relapse in each area.

Shortfalls: What was Missing!

There are a few missing elements in the book, but nothing major. For example, in the Diversity Library (pps.10-14), Wong stresses the positive aspects of diversity, while lightly mentioning "weaknesses." Although he does include a "Weaknesses" column in the Diversity Library Example (table 2.1), it would be beneficial to add a few negative factors as rows, such as Temperament (often negative), Maturity (detrimental when missing), or even Blind Spots.

In *Experiential Values*, Wong leans too heavily toward generalization while dealing with *Generational Values* (p. 29). It is a fact that these exist and affect behaviors and interpersonal relations, but the generations as described are not homogeneous. It is not uncommon to find a Traditionalist born in 1983, or a Generation X-er born out-of-time in 1935. He makes a similar assumption on page 93, where his wording implies that older generations didn't "want to change the world." However, this is far short of a fatal flaw, and does not devalue the lessons for the reader. The astute reader will naturally recognize exceptions from his or her own experience, and move forward.

Who might benefit from the Book

This is a book with great value outside of the intended audience. Any type of leader, apart from project managers, could work through this book and significantly improve their personal effectiveness. Furthermore, it is not only leaders who would benefit; individual team members would not only find much in this book for them, but including them would bring unprecedented harmony and synergy to a team.

Conclusion

Do not expect a quick read to glean a few nuggets of information, just to return it to the shelf as another book read. This book delivers its greatest value if the reader is prepared to pay close attention, and carefully and honestly work through exercises that equip him or her to meaningfully improve personal performance. This book is, in its best use, a mirror for self-reflection; a mentor for imparting wisdom; a tutor leading to real and lasting improvement.

This is a book to read introspectively and deliberately, assessing, practicing, and only then moving to the next topic or chapter. If the reader moves too quickly from one chapter to another, the earlier lessons will unintentionally evaporate into good feelings without having been converted to habit and wisdom.

This is a book that should end up dog-eared and worn from repeated use over the years.

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About the Reviewer



Ralph J. Mauelshagen, PMP, CCP

North Texas, USA



Ralph Mauelshagen has been leading Information Technology projects to successful completion for three decades, punctuated by assignments in Enterprise Architecture and Strategy, Development Management, and Business Intelligence leadership. Ralph is a first-generation American with personal roots in the Midwest, the South, and the West. With a Technology degree for the mind and a Biblical Studies degree for the heart, his diversity of education, geography, culture, and business contexts enables him to recognize and create value by blending ideas from diverse domains.